BRIEF TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION

ON THE ECONOMIC UNION AND

DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS FOR CANADA

by

WOMEN AGAINST THE BUDGET

in conjunction with

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Introduction:

We are appearing here today on behalf of Women Against the Budget, a large coalition of women's groups, women from trade unions, and individual women who came together in response to the introduction of the B.C. Government's budget package. Our concern is to ensure that the specific effects upon and demands by women are articulated not only in the fight against the Social Credit government legislation but in any forum where economic decisions affecting our lives are discussed. This brief was prepared in conjunction with the Women's Research Centre.

A major term of reference of this Commission is to examine and report on "appropriate national goals and policies for development." We are here today as representatives of a number of women's groups in Vancouver to offer you a framework for looking at and considering both the Canadian economy's impact on women and women's impact on the Canadian economy.

We will not be presenting statistics as you will receive more than enough during the course of your work. We will not be dealing specifically with the issues traditionally seen as relevant to women and the economy - namely equal pay, affirmative action, daycare and non-traditional work. This is not because they are not important. They are, in fact, long term critical issues for women - and they were all clearly delineated more than a decade ago in the 1971 Royal Commission Report on the Status of Women. Why are these issues still confronting us, and why are they so consistently defined by governments and the corporate sector as "too expensive" to implement? Action on these issues would do much to improve the situation of women in the Canadian economy. Does the inaction on these key issues mean this country cannot afford to have a non-discriminatory society? Certainly this would appear to be the message behind the recent British Columbia government budget legislation and continued inaction from the federal government and major corporations.

To repeat, we want to offer a philosophical framework for more effectively understanding the situation of women in the Canadian economy. We will do this by presenting an analysis of how the Canadian economy has functioned and how this has worked to exclude women, and has excluded acknowledgement of their work. We will give examples based on the economic development research undertaken over the past eight years by the Women's Research Centre. And, we will describe how we think things could be different.

Background:

There is no doubt that economic development - the creation or expansion of the economy, of a community, region or country - is the core of nation building. Economic development defines settlement patterns, reaches daily into the marketplace and factory, and determines our standard of living. Historically, the nation builders have been recorded as men. Etched on the front of schools and dotted across the map of Canada are the names we learned in social studies class - Champlain, Galt, Laurier, McGee, Tupper, Fraser. Future textbooks will likely describe the nation building efforts of Blair, Trudeau, Irving, McMahon and Smallwood.

From the early fur trading days to present energy explorations the relationship between nation builders - those who develop and those who govern - has been close and mutually beneficial. The men and companies shaping Canada's economic development play an intensive role in government policy decisions. For example, Innis points out that "it is no mere accident that the present Dominion coincides roughly with the fur trading areas of northern America...the Northwest Company was the forerunner of the present confederation."(1) Furthermore, the very political act of constructing the Canadian Pacific Railway was intended to hasten settlement of western Canada and thus prohibit its annexation to the United States. It also brought the wheat economy to the

prairies and a pattern of settlement and urban development that remains inextricably linked to the rail line.

Continued development of northern Canada's oil and gas has included enactment of federal policies to ensure Canadian sovereignty in the high arctic;formation of a government-owned resource company - Petrocan; construction of instant, isolated resource-based settlements and, despite regulatory delays, the intricate agreement between local, provincial, federal and international government and industry to construct pipelines and coal development projects and so on.

For those of us who are governed - who are outside the corporate and government world - the benefits of developing the economy in this way are not so obvious. With the singular exception of Justice Berger's inquiry into the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline, people's concerns about economic development have been given short shrift. What is important to development planners as they assess socio-economic impact are narrow interpretations of factors of production such as labour (how many workers are needed), transportation (how do we get the resource out), and environment (where can we dump the tailings). Community concerns and the concerns of women and families are seldom, if ever, seriously taken into account.

The exclusion of women:

The historical exclusion of women from the public worlds of business, finance, economics and politics means even less is known about how women live and work and the resulting invisibility is reflected in public policies and legislation. The world of women - the private world of the home, the family, community, and limited areas of the labour force - if seen at all, is seen as peripheral to those who plot Canada's economic future.

However, the contribution of women to the economic development of this country has been, and continues to be, an enormous contribution of time, self, energy and ability. These contributions have been shaped not only by particular environmental conditions and economic organization but also by varying conceptions of femininity, sex roles, and female status vis-a-vis male status. The work that women do - household and subsistence production, child care, labour force participation, employment, and income-generation - has a pervasive influence on the general quality of life that they are able to maintain, their capacity for personal fulfillment, and the survival and well-being of their families and communities.

Yet, in the majority of cases where this development characterizes the economic structure and organization of the country, women are excluded from all stages of the process, from planning, to execution, to completion. Many recent studies that specifically address the concerns of women in relation to development note that accounts of women's work are rarely found. Women's working situations, and descriptions or analyses of the work itself, are poorly or minimally articulated into general accounts of economic development. For example, Beneria makes the following statement in an article written in 1980:

> Available estimates of the world's working population grossly underestimate women's participation in economic activities and cannot tell us much about what types of tasks women perform in terms of the existing gender-related division of labour. Yet we have reached a period in history in which the most basic tenets and assumptions influencing relationships between men and women in society have been called into question, and these include the existing division of labour. (2)

Although the question of the role and value of women's work has been raised many times and in many different parts of the world, the problem continues to exist. Women's interests and spheres of activity continue to be seen as at best marginal to and at worst irrelevant to economic development. Women <u>may</u> become visible if they work in the paid labour force, that is, outside

the home in what is often called the public world. But even in this regard provision is rarely made for their participation, and again their interests are seen as secondary at best.

Exclusion of women can therefore be understood to mean the following:

1. A failure to see the sexual division of labour as significant to the process of economic development, with the result that only "men's work" is defined as relevant. Family, household and the domestic sphere are defined as marginal, and the work of the domestic domain and the character of the domestic economy remain invisible, unexplored, and unconsidered.

2. A failure to raise any questions that specifically concern women in the process of development, based on the lack of recognition that these issues are of crucial concern to women. Women are seen as being definitionally irrelevant to the process.

The traditional view of women in economic development has been, at best, to consider them as manipulable members of the paid or unpaid labour force. For example, the vice president of AMAX of Canada in 1980 described the proposed workforce for the northwest B.C. molybdenum mine at Kitsault and said, "We're hoping to encourage mine workers with families to come here... the ideal would be 60 per cent married workers and 40 per cent single people. That makes for more stability in the work place."(3) These comments illustrate how women are seen as providers of service to husbands, children and the community. However, this work is not considered real work and women's needs, in order to carry out this work, were not taken into consideration in the socio economic assessment planning for Kitsault, or other similar communities.

In some cases women's economic development concerns are assumed to focus on affirmative action and employment. Even when this limited view is acknowledged it is not necessarily planned with women's interests in mind. A B.C. coal

town planning study investigating the possibility of non-traditional work for women stated: "the effect of increasing the proportion of females in the direct labour force is to reduce the projected town population...the potential reduction in service and housing requirements may be considered important in policy analysis." (4) The assumption implicit in that statement - that if more women are in the labour force, services and housing requirements can be reduced - exhibits a complete lack of understanding of women's work inside and outside the home and the needs that arise from the work, not the least of which is adequate child care and family support services. The statement is also an example of how misguided policy analysis can be when women's perspectives are excluded. The most horrifying revelation of their scenario, however, is the suggestion that the living needs of women and children can be bartered for supposedly decreased infrastructure costs.

Beyond this view of women and family as exploitable human units available to meet industrial and governmental economic development labour strategies, the actual lives, needs and concerns of women are invisible. The existing separation between the public world of development and the private world of home and family enforces and encourages women's continued invisibility.

An economic framework that includes women:

What is needed to remedy these omissions is first of all an analytical framework that recognizes women as crucially involved in society and all its organizational forms. We must have an analytical framework which does not simply restrict women to an understanding of their role in the family. Further, this framework for analysis must include a descriptive account and understanding of the domestic economy.

An account that fully includes women is one to which the analysis of the sexual division of labour and the domestic economy is integral, not marginal, and one that seeks to explain the character of the relationship between the domestic domain and the wider society other than in terms of, for example, "women's role

in the family," There is now a considerable literature which seeks to accomplish this, as well as a large number of critical works that further define the problem.(5)

To go back to the terms of reference of this Commission - when you are considering "policies for development," it is essential that the framework include women. To do that requires an analysis that begins with the household and/or family, the basic unit of membership in our society, and with the definition of this unit as an economic unit, with the recognition that the work of the household is work. It is predominantly women who do the work of the domestic domain. Any analysis must also procede with their contribution in these terms. This analysis includes women directly in the focus of the investigation. Women's concerns with economic development would be one of the issues; women's participation in the process another. Women must not be seen as passive recipients, but as members of the household, the community and the society, with active interests and concerns based on active participation. This would be the case whether they worked in the household only, or in household and labour force. In considering economic development in these terms, the household/domestic economy thus becomes an integral part of the overall analysis of development and change.(6)

A review of Canada's economic decision-making:

In addition to the need for this new framework we've described, which inlcudes women, further changes are needed in economic planning and decision-making.

We are speaking as women residents of British Columbia. In B.C., we have had a wealth of experience with federal, provincial and international economic initiatives - particularly with regard to resource development projects. From this experience, we have learned a great deal about the economy, about how economic decisions are made in this country, and about the impacts of these decisions on women's lives.

We have seen clearly that the modus operandi of Canadian economic

decision-making is expediency. In spite of the long history of energy/resource development in Canada and in B.C. specifically, Canada has still not developed a comprehensive policy or approach to energy/resource development. Further, Canada's approach to socio-economic assessment of mega-projects has been one of ad-hoc responses (as Andrew Thompson, Commissioner of the West Coast Oil Ports Inquiry, pointed out in his report in 1978). For example, discussions about transporting Alaskan gas and oil south through Canada had been going on for more than a decade when this government's impact exercises for the Alaska Highway Gas Pipeline - the largest capital project undertaken by private industry in Canada's history - finally began in north eastern British Columbia. Furthermore, these public hearings were held after approval had been given to this project by the federal government.

We've seen economic expediency manipulate even such a widely supported Canadian value as the institution of the family - as evidenced by the stages of development of single industry towns in B.C.: during the resource extraction process, when industry sees an "independent" work force as preferable, unmarried workers or workers who will leave their families behind are given priority for jobs. At stages when a longer term work committment is required, it is then expedient for workers with families to be hired and to bring their families to the town, for the "stability" the families provide. Of course, it is an exceptional single industry town that provides the adequate housing, social services, transportation, recreation and health care that those "stabilizing" families need to survive.

And we know that some provincial or territorial governments in this country will even be so crass and obvious in their attempts to control the energy development work force that they will subsidize alcohol but ignore the problems of the high costs and unavailability of fresh produce in resource communities.

It is also clear, from watching economic initiatives in this country, that Canada does not have an industrial strategy: economic decisions are not based on the needs of the people of Canada but rather they are based on what benefits the multi-national apparatus which is largely American-dominated. Operating in the absence of an industrial strategy, with ad-hoc responses based on expediency, has proved to be profitable for some Canadians. The vested interests of corporations and, in turn, of governments are served well by these practices. It is those of us who are governed - who are outside the corporate and government worlds - who suffer. It is community concerns and the concerns of women and families that are seen as exogenous factors and are seldom taken into account in economic decision-making.

We are the targets of myths and manipulation. When new economic initiatives are in the works governments sell them to us by promising that they will mean more jobs. We know that in northern B.C. those jobs have rarely materialized but go instead to international teams of resource extraction/ development workers. The "Northern Vision" attitude from the 1950's has contributed to the myth that any economic development is good - even "boom-and-bust" development - but we know that the consequences are most often degradation of the land and disruption of social communities. We know the impact of an economy dominated by corporate strategy that requires periods of high unemployment. In such periods we are expected to buy the myth of Restraint - to accept that governments simply can't afford social services and medicare and even human rights - at least that's what the government of B.C. would have us believe. And all the while corporate profits rise until profit margins reach the level that is considered "appropriate" - as defined by the corporate sector - for new investment. It is ironic that in "good" economic times governments tell us the social services that our tax dollars pay for are basic human rights, but in "bad" economic times they are the first programs to be cut - with the result that when

we need them most, they're gone. As an example witness the attacks on Medicare which, if successful, will require user fees from the very people whose livelihood is threatened by unemployment and rising prices.

In B.C. and other parts of Canada the micro-technology revolution is quickly replacing resource development as our saviour. If we oppose it we are derided for being "anti-progress." As women, our criticism of "progress" and "technological development" is frequently caricatured as a biological fear of science and machinery. In fact, anyone who has the audacity to criticize the corporate strategy of mega-projects and boom-bust development is characterized as being anti-progress. We are neither anti-progress nor anti-change. But we <u>are</u> categorically opposed to technological and resource development at the expense of the economic, physical and emotional health of those people whose labour is seconded to build it.

It is time to cut through the myths and manipulation that have produced widespread cynicism and alienation. Governments and the corporate sector have to start telling the truth! Their economic practices have not produced the classless society North America is supposed to be nor the "chicken in every pot" we were all promised after the last Great Depression. And, ours is not an economy out of control. There are decisions being made by governments and corporations: decisions to put hundreds of millions of dollars into highways and stadiums rather than social programs or health care; decisions to delay new investment until profit margins grow still higher. Different decisions can and must be made based on different priorities.

The Public Commission on Social and Community Service Cutbacks has reported:

> Everywhere in this province, one of the richest in Canada, residents expressed uncertainty, often approaching despair, about the future...they saw the way of life in their communities 'deteriorating, and could only imagine worse for the future.' (7)

At one level the people of Ocean Falls and Tasu in the Queen Charlotte

Islands, who saw their communities die,and on an individual level the Community Incentive Program workers who are in danger of losing their $50 a month supplement know first hand the despair the Commission referred to.

The cost in human terms and in economic terms is too great to continue on the path of corporate expediency and ad-hoc economic responses.

The cost is especially high for women.

The impact of the economy on women:

When the Women's Research Centre did a socio-economic impact study related to proposed construction of the Alaska Highway Gas Pipeline, our researchers found that:

> The women, on the whole, seemed to feel that if this pipeline was an economically viable project, it would be built, despite people's concerns. They saw themselves as those who must cope with whatever the governments and big business did to their town, their world, when major development took place. (8)

That is what women's role has been traditionally: we are expected to cope, to adjust, to pick up the pieces. Whenever our husbands go off to work camps and resource towns, when major development takes place, or when the bust follows the boom - as it inevitably does, women are expected to provide the social services and other assistance that governments say they can't afford to provide.

We see it happening now in B.C. The provincial government, using the myth of restraint as the only option, is cutting programs for handicapped children and the elderly; they are freezing welfare rates; they are threatening services for the disabled, daycare, legal aid, and crisis and preventive services for women and children who are victims of violence. Women in B.C.'s north have told us that they are appalled at the effect of the education cutbacks on their children. One community's school bus service has been cut back so that the

children now arrive at school an hour and a half before school starts. Of course further staff and maintenance cuts mean the school doors don't open until 9:00 and there is no supervision of the children as they play and wait outside for that hour and a half. So concerned women must organize car pools or alternate bus services or pre-school supervision programs.

When services are cut back the burden of filling the gap falls on women. For most women, in these times of recession, that burden is being added to an already dangerously over-extended work load - that of a job in the labour force and the tasks of raising a family - on less money with fewer support services. Women are already providing more than should be expected of us. We have a right to say "enough!"

In recession hit communities in northern B.C. the loss of work for the major breadwinner in a family plays itself out in various scenarios:

-- many families simply stay where they are, knowing there is no work in other parts of the province either. So far they have been managing on unemployment insurance and by bartering for services, rather than paying cash.

-- many families use their savings to live on, thus losing that security they were raised to respect. When these savings finally run out, which of course happens at different times for different families, there is <u>always</u> a crisis.

-- in one northern B.C. resource town the mine has closed - first temporarily, now permanently. The crisis centre worker noted an escalation of marriage break-ups after the unemployment benefits ended.

-- some families decide that while the woman stays in the community with the children, who are in school, the man will travel to other parts of the province or country to try to locate work. The women sometimes go on welfare, although we do know of some instances where women could not get welfare in these situations unless they presented a court order

stating they had charged their husbands with desertion. Other women manage to find part time work through a government job creation grant or by working as a waitress or clerk. Women are expected to manage, to bear the responsibility of keeping the family together.

-- some men leave the family, ostensibly to find work, and do not return.

The choice for governments when they decide to cut social services is to "pay now or pay later." For women there is no choice: we and our children pay now in the strain of carrying these burdens and we pay for years to come as we suffer the costs in long term damage both to our families' physical, emotional and mental health, and to our economic status.

To say all of this is unfair is an understatement. It is also wrong-headed in economic terms.

Pushing women back into the home is an economic strategy that may have worked in earlier times - it has certainly been done before. After the Second World War, women, who had been encouraged during the war to join the work force, were sent home. They were subjected to an emotional campaign that said that if they stayed in the work force they were taking jobs away from the men returning from the war, the men who deserved jobs. Similarly, today we know that women in B.C. are caught in a vicious Catch-22 situation: if they are on welfare they are castigated as welfare bums; if they work outside the home they are accused of taking jobs away from men - even though the jobs available to women are in the low-paying female job ghettos and are jobs which most men refuse to consider.

Many of us have grown up with the romantic notion of how our mothers baked their own bread, canned fruit and vegetables and made their children's clothes to contribute to the economy of their families, to help make ends meet.

But times have changed and we "can't go home again" - it doesn't make sense, because it isn't cost effective. In simple terms it costs more today to bake your own bread than it does, in this technological age, to buy processed

bread. To assume that women can simply take up extra work (which many are trying to do) to save money, to make ends meet, undermines women's time and household work. And more to the point - statistics show that most families need two salaries to survive. Sixty-one percent more families in B.C. would be poor without that second income. Whether they stay at home or not, an incredible 68 per cent of female-headed families live below the poverty line.(9) And for those 10 per cent or more of Canadian women who are battered women, economic independence is critical - a matter, often, of life or death.

So the strategy of pushing women back into the home won't work.

But what we are seeing in this country and in this province are attempts to hold down wages in the public sector and thereby, by a "happy" accident, force wages in the private sector to drop. Working women who already earn appreciably less than working men will suffer most. In addition, education cutbacks will mean that women will never move out of traditional job ghettos. Increase in course costs, decreases in funding, strict control of university and college programmes all combine to limit women's educational possibilities.

And, as micro-technology is touted as our new economic saviour, we can see what the effects on women will be. As the B.C. Federation of Labour has stated:

> While micro-technology will affect the employment of all workers to some degree, it will be women who are affected disproportionately. Most studies agree it will be the workers in the clerical, bank, retail and service sectors who will bear the brunt from micro-technology. (10)

Changes are needed in economic decision-making. It is essential to include women's perspective and to recognize their work in the home and outside, in the work force, as the valuable contribution it is to our economy and to the quality of life. Decisions can and must be made that take into account and consider the impact of economic development on women.

Conclusion:

The picture we've presented to you of how the economy impacts on women is drawn from years of documenting women's situations, from working with women in rape crisis centres, in transition houses, in unions, in educational institutions and in the home. What we've learned is that an economy based on corporate expediency and ad-hoc responses does not work for us.

Governments must make choices and decisions based on a committment to the greater good, a committment, if you will, to a "just society": a society that moves beyond the profit margin mentality and its illusionary "successes" to a vision that encompasses the needs of its citizens to work, to grow and to achieve their full potential as individuals and as members of a community.

As women our experience with government commissions, boards and inquiries has not encouraged us to believe that our analysis, perspectives and needs will be incorporated into recommendations that will, in fact, be acted upon.

We have no reason to expect that your commission will be an exception. Rather, we fear that this commission constitutes, in effect, a market survey, a travelling Goldfarb poll, to determine what the Canadian public will accept in the future as a rationale for continuing business as usual.

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